

**State Government Council
Workgroup on
e-Mail, Shared Calendars, and Document Management
Report of Findings and Recommendations
December 1999**

(Adopted by the State Government Council on January 13, 2000)

Authority

The State Government Council serves in an advisory role to the Nebraska Information Technology Commission. The NITC charter creating the State Government Council includes the following responsibilities:

- 5.2.1 Establish, coordinate, and prioritize technology needs for state agencies;
- 5.2.6 Evaluate and act upon opportunities to more efficiently and effectively deliver government services through the use of information technology;
- 5.2.7 Recommend policies, guidelines, and standards for improving the organization and management of data within state government;

At its September 1999 meeting, the State Government Council adopted a resolution to "examine interoperability and recommend standards and guidelines to achieve collaboration through: e-mail, shared calendars, and document management..."

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the workgroup on e-mail and shared calendars for consideration by the State Government Council.

Background

In November 1997, the Information Resources Cabinet (the predecessor to the NITC) addressed the problem of multiple and isolated e-mail systems by directing agencies to standardize on four e-mail products: OfficeVision (OV/VM and OV/400), Lotus Notes, Microsoft Exchange, and Internet Mail Products based on SMTP/MIME and IMAP4. The IRC also recommended implementation of message switching technology and the creation of a central address directory for address look-up.

The State Government Council workgroup on e-mail and shared calendars evaluated the success of the current environment, identified additional requirements and recommended several changes. The workgroup met four times. Membership and minutes of the workgroup are located on the State Government Council website: <http://www.nitc.state.ne.us/> under State Government Council Workgroups.

The workgroup focused on e-mail and calendar issues and left document management to a separate effort. The workgroup determined that document management involved a different category of software and presented separate issues that go well beyond the goal of universal message switching.

General Principles

The workgroup recommends the following principles and findings to guide decisions on e-mail and calendar functions, now and in the future:

1. State government requires enterprise-wide e-mail capabilities;
2. A central directory of state employees with e-mail addresses is needed, which is complete, accurate, and up-to-date;
3. The central address book should handle web-based accounts;
4. E-mail and calendar standards must allow cost-effective solutions that protect existing agency investments in software and training;
5. E-mail should allow easy exchange of attachments.

Problems and Findings

- A. ***Central Directory and Softswitch:*** The state's current e-mail network includes a central directory, post office, and message switch, which allows an exchange of e-mail among mail systems that conform to the four standards. A product called "Softswitch" automates the synchronization of directories between e-mail servers. The workgroup found that Softswitch is functioning well for the exchange of e-mail. A major limitation is that many agencies are not participating. The workgroup identified several factors contributing to this situation. These include lack of documentation for how agencies participate in the central directory and uncertainty on how to include IMAP4 accounts.

The workgroup reaffirmed the need for a central directory of all state agency e-mail users. The directory should be complete, accurate, up-to-date, and web-based for easy accessibility. In addition to exchanging e-mail, a central directory can also serve workflow applications, include user profiles for security purposes, . IMServices is presently investigating the feasibility of an LDAP (lightweight directory access protocol) system that would serve these broader purposes.

- B. ***OfficeVision:*** The workgroup found that OfficeVision is a barrier to achieving the general principles listed above, because it does not allow the easy exchange of attachments.
- C. ***Calendar Functions:*** The workgroup determined that a need exists for sharing calendars among agencies. This would include sending and receiving meeting notices that would post to one's calendar, viewing calendars, and searches for available times. There is also a need to share scheduling of resources, such as viewing a list of rooms, viewing availability, requesting a conference room, and confirming a reservation.

At present, though, no effective technology exists to accomplish these needs through a central directory and switch. The workgroup decided that the need for this functionality would not justify the expense and disruption of requiring all agencies to use the same calendar system.

The Internet industry is working on a standard that would allow exchange of calendar information. The standard is called ICAP (Internet Calendar Access Protocol). The standard is still under development.

Recommendations

1. The State Government Council should encourage all state agencies to participate in the central directory. Steps to achieve this goal include:
 - a. Document procedures for agencies to participate in the central directory (IMServices), including those using IMAP4 accounts;
 - b. Investigate the feasibility of the LDAP standard (IMServices);
 - c. Contact non-participating agencies (CIO and IMServices).
2. State agencies that are now using OfficeVision for e-mail should consider one of the other three systems, because of the problem of exchanging attachments.
3. IMServices should analyze the cost of maintaining Softswitch and investigate other options that may become available.
4. The workgroup recommends buying NOTES licenses for agency directors who must share their schedules with the Governor's Office. This recommendation is based on the current inability to exchange calendar information across applications. It reflects the existing use of NOTES in several agencies. The workgroup acknowledges that some agency directors may need to maintain two calendars to implement this recommendation.
5. The State Government Council should establish a permanent workgroup on electronic mail, calendaring, and scheduling. The workgroup should meet (at least) quarterly to help develop the enterprise central directory and recommend standards and guidelines regarding implementation and use of e-mail, calendaring and scheduling functions.
6. The workgroup on electronic mail, calendaring and scheduling should explore the need and options for scheduling resources such as reserving conference rooms.